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Verkuyten, Maykel

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Ethnic in-group bias among minority and majority early adolescents: The perception of negative peer behaviour

Maykel Verkuyten*

Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Using social identity theory (SIT) as a framework, this study investigates in-group bias in the context of negative social behaviour among Dutch and Turkish children (10–13 years of age) living in the Netherlands. Using stories about peer behaviour in which ethnicity was an available dimension, the children were asked to evaluate the perpetrator and to explain the negative behaviour. Explanations were analysed in terms of the locus of explanation and the level of linguistic abstraction at which the perpetrator's behaviour was explained. Hence, there were three measures of in-group bias. In addition, ethnic identification, perceived multicultural education and participants' experiences with ethnic victimization were considered as predictor variables. The results revealed a small degree of in-group bias for the evaluation and the locus of explanation, but not for linguistic abstraction. Furthermore, for both ethnic groups, it was found that stronger ethnic identification was related to a less negative evaluation of an in-group perpetrator. A higher degree of ethnic victimization was related to a less negative perception of the perpetrator. In addition, a higher degree of perceived exposure to multicultural education was associated with a more negative perception of the perpetrator, particularly among the Dutch participants. It was concluded that the study of ethnic attitudes among children should focus more on the perceptions of actual ethnic conflicts and on specific settings such as schools. Furthermore, it is important to use explicit and implicit measures and to include both majority and minority group children.

Many studies have described and explained the development of children's ethnic attitudes (see Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995; Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001; Fishbein, 1996; Nesdale, 2001, for reviews). In order to measure these attitudes, research has predominantly focused on ethnic preferences and trait assignments. Children are typically asked to indicate their preference for one ethnic group over

* Requests for reprints should be addressed to Maykel Verkuyten, Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands (e-mail M.Verkuyten@fss.uu.nl).

another or they are asked to assign positive and negative attributes and traits to stimulus figures representing the ethnic in-group and out-group. The results of most of these studies have indicated that children often display in-group bias (e.g. Bennett, Sani, Lyons, & Barrett, 1998; Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001; Yee & Brown, 1992).

However, it can be argued that these studies do not tell us much about the way children perceive and evaluate ethnic conflicts. That is, these studies do not examine, for example, whether children show in-group bias in the interpretation of ethnic exclusion from peer group activities. The lack of studies focusing on these kinds of negative behaviour is unfortunate because it is exactly this that theorists and practitioners alike are trying to understand and reduce.

Using social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as a framework, the present study examines perceptions and interpretations of negative peer behaviour by ethnic majority and minority early adolescents living in the Netherlands. According to SIT, establishing favourable distinctiveness of one's group *vis-à-vis* other groups, or in-group bias, may help to achieve a positive group identity. However, for SIT, in-group bias is not inevitable but is a function of the intensity of group identification, normative beliefs about group differences, and the status positions of the groups concerned (Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1993; McGarty, 2001; Turner, 1999). In addition, research has shown that in-group bias depends on the type of social judgment, such as evaluations and attributions (e.g. Jackson *et al.*, 1993; Nesdale & McLaughlin, 1987). Hence, for SIT, in-group bias is by no means an automatic product of group distinctions. The theory stresses that psychological processes should be examined in social context. That means, for example, that in addition to group identification attention should be given to the specific social meanings associated with groups and group distinctions. However, very few empirical studies on intergroup attitudes among children have examined the actual normative context and the role of status differences. In addition, existing studies typically have not examined whether in-group bias depends on the type of social judgment.

The central aim of the present research, conducted in the Netherlands is to examine ethnic attitudes in the context of negative peer behaviour and in relation to ethnic group identification, perceived classroom norms, and ethnic group status. In addition, for assessing ethnic attitudes, different kinds of social judgments were examined. In order to elicit these judgments, stories concerning negative behaviour were presented to Dutch and Turkish participants who were asked to evaluate the perpetrator in the story and to give an explanation for the behaviour.

Group identification

According to SIT, individuals who identify strongly with their group are motivated to evaluate their own group more positively than other groups. For these individuals, group membership has important implications for the self-concept, and as such for the striving towards a positive self. Hence, in general, SIT predicts a positive correlation between ethnic identification and ethnic in-group bias. However, previous research on various group memberships has failed to find such a consistently positive relationship (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999, for a review). Furthermore, studies on children indicate that in-group preference may be unrelated to group identification and may even antecede self-identification as a group member (e.g. Bennett *et al.*, 1998).

One reason for the inconsistent evidence for a relationship between identification and in-group bias may be the need to draw a distinction between in-group and out-group aspects of in-group bias (Brewer, 1999; Cameron *et al.*, 2001; Nesdale, 2001). In-group-oriented patterns of preference are typically assumed to be accompanied by rejection of other groups. Technically, the development of ethnic attitudes has traditionally been assessed by means of forced-choice techniques that do not allow the independent assessment of in-group and out-group attitudes. Other studies do measure the in-group and out-group aspects of group differentiation separately but use these measures to compute difference scores that are subsequently used in the analyses. Difference scores have the advantage that the effects of some response biases are taken into account. For example, children may have a tendency to give positive responses so that in-group evaluations correlate strongly with out-group evaluations. Hence, in this study, in-group bias will be examined with reference to difference scores.

However, various authors have pointed out that there are different processes determining the in-group and out-group aspects of group differentiation (e.g. Brewer, 1999; Fishbein, 1996). As a result, in-group preference cannot be equated with prejudice towards out-groups. In addition, group identification has been found to be associated more strongly with in-group liking than with out-group rejection (Hinkle & Brown, 1990), also among children (e.g. Bigler *et al.*, 1997). However, these studies did not examine ethnic attitudes among majority and minority group children. For example, in their experiment, Bigler *et al.* (1997) used artificial groups of white children, and Bennett *et al.* (1998) focused on English and Scottish children. The present study examines ethnic group identification in relation to both in- and out-group attitude by Dutch and Turkish children. Ethnic identification was expected to be related to in-group bias and particularly to in-group attitude.

Normative issues

In-group bias depends, among other things, on the normative context. Social norms can take many forms but generally refer to what is considered contextually appropriate behaviour. The present study focuses, first, on the role of more general norms related to the differential evaluation of negative behaviour, and, secondly, on more specific classroom norms related to the appreciation of ethnic diversity.

Research has documented the so-called positive-negative asymmetry in intergroup differentiation (see Buhl, 1999; Mummendey & Otten, 1998, for reviews). In-group bias is consistently found on evaluation dimensions and behaviour with positive connotations but not on negatively valued dimensions or negative behaviour. This has also been found for children (e.g. Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996). Using positive and negative adjectives, Bennett *et al.* (1998) examined evaluative judgments about five national groups among Scottish and English children. They found clear in-group bias for the number of positive adjectives applied but no group differences for the number of negative adjectives. Furthermore, Killen and Stangor (2001) studied children's moral reasoning about peer exclusion and inclusion in stereotypical race and gender group contexts. They found that early adolescents did not display racial in-group bias in their judgments about social exclusion. That is, the exclusion of White or Black children was considered equally wrong by White and Black participants. The same was found for gender distinctions (see also Nesdale, 2000; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001).

For this positive-negative asymmetry, normative explanations have been proposed

and tested in particular (see Mummendey & Otten, 1998; Otten & Mummendey, 2000). A normative explanation for the positive-negative asymmetry argues that, in general, the differential evaluation of negative traits or behaviour is socially less justifiable than the differential evaluation of positive traits or behaviour. Wenzel and Mummendey (1996) showed that negative valence increases concern with the legitimacy and appropriateness of unequal group evaluations (Mummendey & Otten, 1998). Killen and Stangor (2001) found that older children used social normative reasoning and rejected social exclusion on the basis of group stereotypes. Furthermore, in a study among ethnic majority and minority early adolescents, Verkuyten, Kinket, and van der Wielen (1997) showed that ethnic victimization was typically seen as an act for which there is no justified reason and that it is contrary to socially accepted norms. Hence, socially shared beliefs may influence the differential evaluation of negative behaviour so that children can be expected to show little in-group bias.

The present study was conducted within classrooms. It examined whether perceived classroom norms against negative ethnic distinctions have an effect on group attitudes. Particularly, the perception of negative peer behaviour is examined in relation to perceived multicultural education. Research on the effects of multicultural education on children's ethnic attitudes is limited (see Banks, 1995; Bigler, 1999). There are some descriptive studies about educational interventions in particular school settings. These studies indicate that curriculum interventions are largely ineffective in altering children's negative ethnic attitudes. It is, however, difficult to draw more general conclusions on the basis of research comparing only a few schools. Apart from the level of multicultural education, there are always many other school characteristics that may obscure existing differences or explain the differences found. To avoid such problems, a whole array of schools should be studied. Studies in the Netherlands that have included a great number of schools have found that multicultural education has a positive effect on ethnic in-group bias, particularly for Dutch early adolescents (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001).

Since 1985, Dutch primary schools have been legally obliged to implement a multicultural programme that tries to foster understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity, to promote positive inter-ethnic interactions and to combat racism and discrimination. In practice, schools differ strongly in how they carry out such multicultural curricula (Kloosterman, 1991). However, ethnic victimization is predominantly discussed in terms of ethnic majority groups harassing or excluding minorities (Leeman, 1994), and both ethnic majority and minority group children have been found to interpret ethnic victimization as something that majority children do to minority children (Verkuyten *et al.*, 1997). This normative context makes it more difficult for majority group children to interpret negative behaviour in an in-group protective way. In the present study it was expected that perceived multicultural education would be negatively related to in-group bias, particularly for Dutch early adolescents.

Group status

The two groups of Dutch and Turkish participants differ in social status. Social status differences can take many forms and can be communicated in various ways. Here the focus is on ethnic victimization by peers. Many studies have shown that negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination are pervasive in the lives of ethnic minorities.

For example, in early adolescence, minority group children in the Netherlands have been found to be aware of their minority position and they report more experiences with ethnic victimization by peers (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

In late childhood, peers play an important role in children's social world and can influence the development of ethnic attitudes. However, the role of peers has so far not received much attention in research. Aboud and Doyle (1996) found that there was no relationship between the ethnic beliefs of children and their peers, and that children were unaware of their peers' beliefs. However, when peers make their ethnic beliefs explicit they can exert considerable influence. In particular the direct expression of positive beliefs has been found to reduce prejudicial attitudes (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999).

The present study examines ethnic group attitudes as a function of personal experiences with ethnic name-calling and social exclusion. These forms of behaviour are public expressions of prejudice and frequent sources of conflict. It is quite likely that being teased, excluded or called names because of one's ethnicity affects intergroup evaluations. Empirical evidence for this assumption is lacking, however. An exception is a study of Dutch and Turkish early adolescents that found a negative association between experiences with ethnic victimization and out-group evaluation measured by trait ratings (Verkuyten, 2002). Hence, personal experiences with ethnic victimization may lead to a less favourable attitude towards out-groups. However, it is also possible that victimization experiences lead to the internalization of problems of low self-esteem and high self-blame (see Deater-Deckard, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2000, for reviews) resulting in a relatively more favourable attitude towards (out-group) perpetrators.

Social judgments

The present study focuses on children's judgments about negative ethnic behaviour in the context of two children interacting. The young adolescents were asked to evaluate and to explain the perpetrator's behaviour. Hence, two types of measures were used: the overall evaluation of the perpetrator and the explanation of the behaviour. In examining group relations among children, relatively few studies have focused on different judgments simultaneously (e.g. Corenblum, Annis, & Young, 1996; Nesdale, 2000). However, categorization effects may depend on the type of social judgment, such as evaluations and attributions (e.g. Jackson *et al.*, 1993) and whether judgments are more explicit or implicit (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Children's ethnic attitudes are predominantly examined in terms of the explicit evaluative perceptions of in-group and out-group. Few studies have used more unobtrusive or implicit measures (e.g. Nesdale & McLaughlin, 1987), but there is a clear need for them (Schofield, 1991).

In addition to the evaluation of the perpetrator character in the story, the present research examines both the locus of the explanation and the linguistic abstraction at which the behaviour of the perpetrator is explained. The locus of explanation reflects whether the cause of the negative behaviour is perceived as something internal to the perpetrator (e.g. having a nasty or mean disposition) or as something that is external to that person and related to the victim (e.g. being itself a bossy child or an ethnic minority member).

The other measure concerns the level of linguistic abstraction at which behaviour of

in-group and out-group members is described (Maass, Castelli, & Arcuri, 2000). In general, people are unaware of the subtle variations in linguistic strategies and they are unlikely to reflect consciously on language abstraction (e.g. Von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1997). Research concerned with the linguistic intergroup bias (LIB) assesses the relative abstractedness of language as an indicator of intergroup bias (Maass, Caccarelli, & Rudin, 1996; Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989). In agreement with SIT, participants have been found to prefer relatively concrete expressions for types of desirable out-group behaviour, and relatively abstract descriptions for desirable in-group behaviour. The present study examined to what extent in-group bias was shown in early adolescents' use of linguistic abstraction with which they explained the behaviour of the perpetrator. Furthermore, the aim was to examine whether the measure of linguistic abstraction yielded different results than would an explicit evaluation measure.

To summarize, the central aim of this research is to study ethnic in-group bias in terms of the evaluation and explanation of negative peer behaviour by majority and minority group early adolescents. The focus is on the evaluation of and explanation for the negative behaviour of the perpetrator. Following SIT, it was expected that those children scoring high on ethnic identification would show in-group bias and, particularly, would perceive the in-group perpetrator less negatively. However, only a small amount of in-group bias was expected because, in general, the differential evaluation of negative behaviour is socially inappropriate. Further, it was expected that greater exposure to multicultural education would be related to a more negative perception of an ethnic in-group and out-group perpetrator. This was expected for the Dutch participants in particular. Also examined was whether participants' experiences with ethnic victimization was associated with the perception of the perpetrator. Finally, the study examined whether an explicit evaluation measures would yield different results for in-group bias than the more implicit measure of linguistic abstraction.

Dutch and Turkish early adolescents participated in the study. The Turks are one of the numerically largest minority groups in the Netherlands. They have a history of migrant labour and most are Muslims and they have a strong sense of their own culture and history that they want to preserve. There are clear indications that the Turks are evaluated most negatively by the Dutch. Verkuyten and Kinket (2000), for example, found that Dutch children showed different preferences for contact with contemporaries of different ethnic groups. Turkish children were the least liked, followed by Moroccans, and the Surinamese were more accepted. This same patterns of preferences has been found among Dutch adolescents and adults (see Hagendoorn, 1995). Furthermore, Turkish children have been found to experience more ethnic victimization than other minority groups (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Method

Participants

Questionnaire data were gathered in 172 classrooms in 78 primary schools across the country. Originally, a cross-section of 200 schools were approached using Dutch national listings of primary schools. The schools were selected from the major Dutch cities. In some cities existing contacts were used for selecting the schools and in other

cities the schools were chosen randomly. The schools which agreed to participate form a cross-section of schools in 30 different cities in all regions of the country.

At each school, the children in the two highest forms (10–13 years of age) participated on a voluntary basis. All children approached were willing to participate. Ethnic background was assessed by means of self-definition and two questions on the ethnic background of the parents. For the present analyses, the focus is on those early adolescents who used the same label to define themselves as well as both parents. The sample used in the analyses contained 1,593 participants of ethnic Dutch background and 598 participants of Turkish background. In total, 50.3% were girls and 49.7% boys, and these percentages were similar for the Dutch and Turkish participants. Fifteen per cent of the participants were 10 years old, 43% were 11, 35% were 12, and 7% were 13. The mean age was 11.38 years ($SD = 0.82$). There was no information available on the parents and their socio-economic background. However, the socio-economic position of the Turks is one of the lowest in the Netherlands.

The children completed a questionnaire under supervision. The research was introduced to the children as a study on life in school, school achievements and group relations. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions about educational attitudes, performances and the self-concept. In the second part, questions on classroom proceedings and rules, ethnic identification, and negative social behaviour were asked.

Design and measures

Each participant was presented with four short stories describing incidents between two children. These stories were taken from a previous study of ethnic minority and majority early adolescents in the Netherlands (Verkuyten *et al.*, 1997). In this study it was found that name-calling, social exclusion by peers and the unequal division of valued objects among contemporaries were seen as typical forms of negative peer behaviour. The present study focused on two stories that dealt with social exclusion from play and schoolwork respectively, and two stories about the unequal division of goods.

In order to measure in-group and out-group attitudes, each participant responded to two stories with an ethnic in-group perpetrator and two stories with an ethnic out-group perpetrator.¹ In the analyses, the mean score for each of the two stories was used as an in-group and an out-group measure respectively. Hence, the analysis focuses on the perception of the ethnic in-group and out-group perpetrator by Dutch and Turkish participants.

As in other studies, ethnicity was presented in the stories using first names (e.g. Crisp, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2001; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1997). In the Netherlands, first names are clear indicators Dutch or Turkish background. Typical and familiar Dutch

¹ In the research a complex experimental design was used. Within each of the four stories the roles of perpetrator and victim were systematically varied for ethnicity and gender. Thus, ethnicity (Dutch vs. Turkish) and gender (boy vs. girl) were varied for the perpetrator and the victim character of the story, yielding 16 different combinations with inter- and intra-ethnic as well as inter- and intra-gender interactions. Hence, all possible permutations were used. However, because of demand-load limits, not all permutations were examined for each participant. Assessments were incomplete randomized within and between participants, resulting in a 4 (between-participant permutation sequence) \times 4 (within-participant permutation sequence) incomplete randomized block design. Elsewhere, this experimental design has been explained in detail and the results have been fully analysed (Verkuyten, Linssen, & Thijs (2003)). Readers interested in this can contact the present author for a copy. Here the focus is on the perception of the perpetrator in relation to the role of identification, multicultural education and experiences with ethnic victimization as key variables that have not been examined previously.

names (e.g. Maarten, Petra) were contrasted with typical and familiar Turkish names (e.g. Fatima, Ahmet).

The four stories, with examples of names used, were: (1) 'At the playground, a few children are playing tag. Fatma asks Marleen whether she can join in. Marleen doesn't want this and does not let Fatma join in'; (2) 'It's the teacher's birthday tomorrow and the children split up in group to make her something. Pieter wants to be in a group with Ahmet. Ahmet doesn't want Pieter to join them and tells him to join a different group'; (3) 'It's Leyla's birthday today and she is handing out sweets to her classmates. She's got a bag of sweets and gives everyone two. When it's Petra's turn she only gives her one instead of two'; and (4) 'Jan has been picked to hand out balls in the playground. Mustafa comes over to Jan and asks him for a ball. But Jan gives the balls to the other children instead'.

In the introduction, the children were asked to read four short stories. Subsequently and for each story, they were asked to evaluate the perpetrator of the negative behaviour. This question was rated on the 7-point scale of seven 'faces' as developed by Yee and Brown (1992). The faces range from very sad to very happy with the biggest smile indicating the most positive attitude, the one with the straight mouth a neutral position, and the biggest frown the most negative attitude. A higher score indicates a more positive overall evaluation of the perpetrator.

In the second question, which was open-ended, the children were asked to give a short explanation (one blank line) for the negative behaviour of the perpetrator: 'Why do you think that [name] acts like this?'. The explanations given were coded in two ways. First, the locus of the explanation was examined. In reading the explanations it was found that in their answers the participants focused on the perpetrator (e.g. 'because Jan is a nasty child', 'because Leyla likes to tease others', 'Maarten is always looking for trouble'), on the perpetrator and victim (e.g. 'because Fatma and Marleen do not get along', 'they probably have been fighting earlier') or on the victim ('because Mustafa is not nice', 'well, probably Petra is herself a bossy child'). Hence, the locus of explanation was coded using three categories (1 = perpetrator, 2 = perpetrator and victim, 3 = victim). For the present purposes, a higher score indicates a relatively stronger focus on the victim.

In the next step the type of explanation was coded. The explanations focusing on the perpetrator were coded using Semin and Fiedler's (1988, 1992) linguistic category model. This model distinguishes between four linguistic categories that may be used in describing other people. The same behaviour may be encoded at four levels of abstraction: description action verbs (e.g. the one child *kicks* the another child), interpretive action verbs (e.g. the one child *hurts* the another child), state verbs (e.g. the one child *bates* the other child), and, at the highest level of abstraction, adjectives (e.g. the one child *is aggressive*). The participants' responses were scored on this 4-point scale according to the level of abstraction. For the present purposes, a higher value indicates greater concreteness or lower abstraction.

Because most participants (96%) referred to only one characteristic, categories were coded only once for each respondent. Coding was done by a research assistant familiar with Semin and Fiedler's model. Subsequently a random selection of 150 questionnaires was coded by another researcher. Measures of inter-coder reliability were calculated for the two codings. For the locus of explanation, Cohen's kappa was .98 and for level of abstraction kappa was .89.

Five items were used to measure ethnic identification. These items were taken from previous studies in the Netherlands (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). The items were: 'I

often dislike being Turkish/Dutch', 'Being Turkish/Dutch is important to me', 'I am glad to be Turkish/Dutch', 'If someone says something bad about Turkish/Dutch people, it feels almost as if they say something bad about me', and 'I feel proud to be Turkish/Dutch'. Each question was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 'no, I disagree' to 'yes, I agree'. Reliability analysis yielded an alpha of 0.78. The mean score for the five items was used in the analyses, with a higher score indicating a stronger ethnic identification.

Four questions were used to measure perceived personal experiences with ethnic victimization. The participants were asked to what extent they personally were called names or teased because of their ethnic background. This was asked in connection with their school situation, and with their direct neighbourhood. The other two questions concerned experiences with social exclusion from play activities in school and in the neighbourhood because of their ethnicity. Five-point scales were used ranging from 'No, never' to 'Yes, very often'. Cronbach's alpha for the four questions was 0.68 and the lowest item-total correlation was 0.41. A higher score indicates higher perceived ethnic victimization.

Eight questions (5-point scale) were used to measure perceptions of multicultural education. These questions were taken from previous Dutch studies (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001) and focused on the curriculum and educational practices. Three sample items are, 'Does your teacher ever talk about different cultures in the Netherlands with the class?', 'Do you ever talk about discrimination and racism during lessons?', and 'When negative things are being said about people for other cultures, does your teacher do something about this?'. Alpha for these questions was 0.71 and the lowest item-total correlation was 0.37. A higher score indicates a greater exposure to multicultural education.²

Results

In order to examine ethnic in-group and out-group attitudes, three dependent variables will be considered: the overall evaluation of the perpetrator, the locus of the explanation and the linguistic abstractness of the explanation. In the analyses, ethnic group and gender will be examined as between-participants predictor variables, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and perceived multicultural education as continuous predictor variables. The results are presented in five sections. First, preliminary analysis on possible age differences, order effects and classroom effects will be discussed. Secondly and for descriptive purposes, the mean scores of the continuous predictor variables will be examined. The third set of analyses focuses on the ethnic in-group and out-group scores for the overall evaluation of the perpetrator. Fourthly, in-group and out-group scores will be examined in terms of the locus of explanation for the negative behaviour. The last set of analyses on in-group and out-group judgments focuses on the level of language abstraction used in explaining the behaviour.

² There was no information available on the multicultural programmes used in the different schools. However, a measure of the extent of multicultural education in the class was obtained by three questions posed to the teacher of each class. On a 3-point scale ('not important at all' to 'extremely important') the teachers were asked how important they considered it in their daily teaching to talk about cultural differences in the Netherlands, to teach about racism and discrimination and to encourage children to respect other cultures and religions. As in other studies, the teachers' and pupils' perceptions were found to be significantly related but to share only a limited amount of variance ($r = .20, p < .01$). Furthermore, both here and in previous studies the latter were found to be more predictive for ethnic group evaluations than the former (e.g. Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). Therefore we focused on the children's perceptions.

Preliminary analyses

Preliminary analysis using analysis of variance indicated no age differences (10–11 vs. 12–13) for the three dependent variables. Thus, data were collapsed across ages. In addition, analyses showed that the order of presentation of the four stories had no significant effects on the results obtained for the evaluation and explanation of the behaviour. In addition, classroom effects were examined.

The fact that the data were collected within school-classes may have affected the results. Groups in these classes are rarely formed randomly and children that belong to the same group will at least share some experiences. Therefore, assumptions of independence of observations are often violated (Kenny & Judd, 1984). When the school-class affects ethnic attitudes, multiple regression analysis, analysis of variance or some other standard statistical method are not the appropriate technique to analyse the data. Therefore, multi-level analysis (M1Win version 1.00: Rasbach, Healy, Brown, & Cameron, 1998) was used to examine whether characteristics of the school-class explained perpetrator evaluation and explanation. In doing so, an 'intercept-only model' was examined in which only a random intercept and no explanatory variables were fitted. This model partitions the total variance in an individual level and a school-class level variance. This means that we were able to determine whether there were differences between participants as well as between school-classes. For the overall evaluation of the perpetrator, there turned out to be significant between-class variance (deviance = 31951.85, $p < .05$). However, only 1.6% of the variance in perpetrator evaluation was explained at the level of the school-class. For language abstractness, there was also significant school-class variance (deviance = 16937.37, $p < .01$), and here 1.7% of the variance was explained at the school-class level. For locus of explanation, no significant between-class variance was found. Hence, the variance in perpetrator evaluation and language abstractness could be partly explained by the school-class. However, the individual level explained much more variance for both measures (98.4% and 98.3%, respectively) than class features. Because the school-class effects found were very small, the data were analysed using analysis of variance rather than the more complex multi-level models.

Mean scores

For descriptive purposes, ethnic identification, perceived multiculturalism, and perceived ethnic victimization were examined as multiple dependent variables, using a two-way analysis of variance. Ethnic group (Dutch vs. Turkish), gender and their interaction were entered as between-participant factors. For ethnic group, the adjusted mean scores and standard deviations of the continuous predictor variables are contained in Table 1. On the basis of a 5-point scale, the mean scores indicated relatively strong ethnic identification and a high exposure to multicultural education. The mean scores for ethnic victimization indicate few experiences with victimization.

Two significant multivariate effects (Pillais) were found: for the ethnic group, $F(3, 2191) = 149.23$, $p < .001$, and for gender, $F(3, 2191) = 4.41$, $p < .01$. The univariate results in Table 1 show that, compared to the Dutch participants, the Turkish early adolescents had higher scores for ethnic identification, as well as for perceived multicultural education and ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, univariate analyses showed that boys ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.52$) identified more strongly with their ethnic group than did girls ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.52$), $F(1, 2069) = 7.33$, $p < .01$. There were no

Table 1. Adjusted means (controlling for gender), standard deviations and univariate *F* values for the measures for Dutch and Turkish early adolescents

Measure	Dutch		Turks		F
	M	SD	M	SD	
Ethnic identification	3.29	0.51	3.68	0.46	266.49***
Multicultural education	3.31	0.55	3.58	0.64	93.05***
Ethnic victimization	1.38	0.62	1.70	0.77	103.62***

*** $p < .001$.

gender differences for perceived multicultural education and for perceived ethnic victimization.³

Overall evaluation of perpetrator

In examining ethnic attitudes, the first set of analyses focused on the ethnic in-group and out-group scores for the overall evaluation of the perpetrator. The mean score for the evaluation of the ethnic in-group perpetrator was 2.23 ($SD = 1.46$) and for the out-group perpetrator, it was 2.17 ($SD = 1.41$). Both scores are on the negative side of the 7-point scale indicating that the perpetrator was evaluated negatively. A pairwise test of means showed a significant but very small degree of in-group bias, $t(2191) = 2.30$, $p < .05$.

In-group and out-group evaluation were examined as multiple dependent variables using analysis of variance (General Linear Model). Ethnic group and gender were entered as between-participants factors, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and perceived multicultural education as continuous factors. This analysis yielded four significant multivariate effects.

First, a multivariate effect was found for ethnic victimization, $F(2, 2191) = 24.03$, $p < .001$. The univariate results indicated that ethnic victimization was related positively to overall in-group evaluation, $\beta = .30$, $t = 6.11$, $p < .001$, and to out-group evaluation, $\beta = .32$, $t = 6.62$, $p < .001$. Thus, participants who had experienced more ethnic victimization evaluated the in-group and the out-group perpetrator *less* negatively.

Secondly, the multivariate effect for ethnic identification turned out to be significant, $F(2, 2191) = 3.50$, $p < .05$. The univariate results show a significant but not very strong positive relationship with the evaluation of the in-group perpetrator, $\beta = .15$, $t = 2.04$, $p < .05$. As expected, early adolescents with a higher score on ethnic identification tended to have a relatively less negative attitude towards the in-group perpetrator. There was no significant relationship between ethnic identification and out-group evaluation. These results were similar for both Dutch and Turkish participants as no significant interaction effects were found between ethnic identification and ethnic group.

Thirdly, a significant multivariate effect was found for the perception of multicultural education, $F(2, 2191) = 5.35$, $p < .01$. Perceived multicultural education was negatively related to in-group evaluation, $\beta = -.15$, $t = 2.63$, $p < .01$ as well as to out-group

³ The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between the three measures were low for both ethnic groups. The highest correlation ($-.16$) was between ethnic victimization and ethnic identification for the Turkish participants. All other correlations were below $.10$. Hence, the three measures can be used as relatively independent predictor variables.

evaluation, $\beta = -.20$, $t = 3.23$, $p < .001$. Hence, greater exposure to multicultural education was associated with a more negative evaluation of both in-group perpetrators and out-group perpetrators.

However, the effect for multicultural education was qualified by a significant multivariate interaction effect with ethnic group, $F(2, 2191) = 4.06$, $p < .01$. Univariate results indicated a significant interaction effect for in-group evaluation, $F(1, 2191) = 5.63$, $p < .01$, but not for out-group evaluation. There was a significant negative association between exposure to multicultural education and in-group evaluation for the Dutch, but not for the Turkish early adolescents, $\beta = -.11$, $t = 4.38$, $p < .001$, and $\beta = -.03$, $t = 0.08$, $p > .10$, respectively. Hence as expected, only for the Dutch, exposure to multicultural education was related to a more negative evaluation of an in-group (Dutch) perpetrator. No other multivariate effects were significant, including the effects for gender.

In addition to these separate analyses for in-group and out-group evaluation, in-group bias was examined. In-group bias scores were computed by subtracting the out-group evaluation from the in-group evaluation. Hence, a positive score indicates an evaluation relatively in favour of the in-group perpetrator, whereas a negative score means an evaluation in favour of the out-group perpetrator. Analysis of variance with ethnic group and gender as between-participants factors, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and perceived multicultural education as continuous factors, showed a significant interaction effect between ethnic group and multicultural education, $F(1, 2191) = 5.86$, $p < .01$. For the Dutch children, more exposure to multicultural education was related to less in-group bias, $\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$, whereas there was no such association for the Turkish children, $\beta = .05$, $p > .10$. There were no other significant main and interaction effects.

Locus of explanation

For each of the four stories, the participants were asked why they thought that the perpetrator acted negatively towards the other child. In other words, the early adolescents were asked to explain the behaviour of the perpetrator. The answers were coded using three categories of locus of explanation: the perpetrator only, the perpetrator and victim, the victim only.⁴ Category frequencies were computed within the two stories with an in-group or an out-group perpetrator and for the Dutch and Turkish participants separately. The results, shown in Table 2, indicate that most of the participants gave perpetrator explanations. However, there were also explanations that focused on both the perpetrator and the victim or on the victim only.

To examine these results for the locus of explanation more closely, a 3-point scale was used (perpetrator only, perpetrator and victim, victim only) with a higher score indicating that the explanation focused more on the victim. The mean score for the in-group perpetrator was 1.74 ($SD = 0.75$) and for the out-group perpetrator it was 1.65

⁴ For each story, between 9% and 15% of the participants provided answers that were not used in the present analysis. These participants either did not give an explanation, answered with 'I don't know', in their explanation repeated only the act as described in the story, gave an explanation in terms of the circumstances, or gave an explanation that was unrelated to the story. Importantly, there was no systematic difference in these response patterns between Dutch and Turkish participants. Furthermore, only participants with 'valid' answers on all four stories were considered in the analyses. As a result, 21% of the cases were defined as not valid. This percentage shows that the same early adolescents tended to give one or more 'non-valid' explanations for the social exclusion in the four stories.

Table 2. Percentages for each category for locus of explanation and for language abstraction, for in-group and out-group perpetrator and for Dutch and Turkish participants

	Dutch		Turkish	
	In-group perpetrator	Out-group perpetrator	In-group perpetrator	Out-group perpetrator
Locus of explanation				
Perpetrator	56	68	58	55
Perpetrator and victim	13	12	16	15
Victim	31	20	26	30
Language abstraction				
Descriptive action verbs	20	20	27	27
Interpretative action verbs	15	14	18	17
State verbs	55	57	43	43
Adjectives	10	9	12	13

($SD = 0.71$), indicating a relatively strong focus on the perpetrator. A pairwise test of means showed a small degree of in-group bias, $t(1607) = 4.45$, $p < .001$.⁵

Locus of in-group and out-group explanation were examined as multiple dependent variables using analysis of variance. Ethnic group and gender were entered as between-participants factors, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and multicultural education as continuous factors. This analysis yielded two significant multivariate effects. The multivariate effect of ethnic victimization was significant, $F(2, 1607) = 3.43$, $p < .05$. The univariate results showed ethnic victimization to be related positively to out-group explanation, $\beta = .07$, $t = 2.13$, $p < .05$ but not to in-group explanation. Hence, if the perpetrator was an out-group member, more experiences with ethnic victimization tended to be associated with an explanation that focused less strongly on the perpetrator relative to the victim. However, this effect was not very strong.

The multivariate effect for ethnic group was also significant, $F(2, 1607) = 4.71$, $p < .05$. There was a significant difference between the Dutch and Turkish early adolescents for out-group explanation, $F(1, 1607) = 5.23$, $p < .05$, but not for in-group explanation. For the out-group perpetrator, the Dutch participants ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .70$) gave an explanation that focused more strongly on the perpetrator, compared to the Turkish participants ($M = 1.76$, $SD = .73$). No other multivariate effects were significant, including the effects for multicultural education.

In-group bias scores were computed by subtracting the out-group locus of the explanation score from the in-group explanation score. Hence, a positive score indicates a locus of explanation relatively in favour of the in-group perpetrator, with a negative score indicating an explanation in favour of the out-group perpetrator. Analysis of variance with ethnic group and gender as between-participants factors, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and perceived multicultural education as continuous factors, showed a significant main effect for ethnic group, $F(1, 1607) = 5.17$, $p < .05$. The Dutch showed more in-group bias than the Turks ($M = .14$, $SD = 0.73$, and

⁵ Additionally, for the in-group perpetrator, locus of explanation showed a low correlation with in-group evaluation ($r = -.07$, $p < .01$). For the out-group perpetrator, the correlation between locus of explanation and out-group evaluation was $-.04$, $p > .10$.

$M = -.02$, $SD = .70$, respectively). However, the effect for ethnic group was qualified by a significant interaction effect with multicultural education, $F(1, 1607) = 3.78$, $p < .05$. For the Dutch early adolescents, more exposure to multicultural education was related to lower in-group bias, $\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$, whereas there appeared not to be an association for the Turkish children, $\beta = .04$, $p > .10$.

Abstractness of perpetrator explanation

In the linguistic category model, four levels of language abstraction are distinguished. Table 2 shows the category percentages for the four levels and the two groups of participants. For explaining the behaviour of the perpetrator, state verbs were used most often, followed by descriptive action verbs, interpretative action verbs, and adjectives as the most abstract pole of the continuum from abstract to concrete terms.⁶

Following previous studies (e.g. Maass *et al.*, 1989, 1996) the four levels of language abstraction were scored on a 4-point scale. For the present purposes, a higher score indicates a more concrete or less abstract explanation. The mean score for the in-group perpetrator was 2.50 ($SD = 0.74$) and for the out-group perpetrator it was 2.49 ($SD = 0.74$). The mean score is in between the categories of interpretative action verbs and state verbs. A pairwise test of means showed no in-group bias, $t(1009) = 0.83$, $p > .10$.⁷

In-group and out-group explanation were examined as multiple dependent variables using analysis of variance. Ethnic group and gender were entered as between-participants factors, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and multicultural education as continuous factors. This analysis yielded two significant multivariate effects, for ethnic victimization, $F(2, 1009) = 3.01$, $p < .05$ and for gender by ethnic victimization, $F(2, 1009) = 5.54$, $p > .01$.

Univariate results indicated that ethnic victimization was related positively to in-group explanation, $\beta = .12$, $t = 2.41$, $p < .05$. Hence, more personal experiences with ethnic discrimination turned out to be associated with a *less* abstract linguistic explanation of social exclusion by an in-group perpetrator.

In addition, for the boys rather than the girls, ethnic victimization was positively related to out-group language abstraction, $\beta = .10$, $t = 2.53$, $p < .01$. For the former, more experience of ethnic victimization was associated with a less abstract explanation of social exclusion by an out-group member.

In-group bias scores were computed by subtracting the in-group language abstraction score from the out-group language abstraction score. Hence, a positive score indicated an explanation in favour of the in-group perpetrator, whereas a negative score meant an explanation in favour of the out-group perpetrator. Analysis of variance showed significant interaction effects for ethnic group by gender, $F(1, 1009) = 3.71$, $p < .05$ and for gender by ethnic victimization, $F(1, 1009) = 9.46$, $p < .01$. Turkish boys ($M = .07$) and girls ($M = .05$) as well as Dutch boys ($M = .05$) showed more in-group

⁶ In some of the explanations that focused on the perpetrator it was argued that group characteristics were responsible for the social exclusion. For example, the social exclusion was explained by arguing that the perpetrator was a boy or Dutch. These explanation were given in between 8% and 19% of the cases. We first conducted an analysis of variance on the number of group characteristics used as an explanation in the stories. Ethnic group was entered as a between-participants factor, and ethnic identification, ethnic victimization and multicultural education as continuous factors. No significant effects were found. In the subsequent analyses we decided to focus on the relative abstraction of the language used to explain the behaviour of the perpetrator by using Semin and Fiedler's linguistic category model.

⁷ For the in-group perpetrator, language abstraction showed a low positive correlation with in-group evaluation ($r = .08$, $p < .01$). For the out-group this correlation was .05, $p > .10$.

bias than Dutch girls ($M = -.03$). However, for all four groups, no significant in-group bias was found.

In addition, for the girls, a positive association was found between perceived victimization and in-group bias, $\beta = .12$, $p < .01$. Hence, for them, more experience of victimization was associated with more in-group bias. For the boys, however, no significant association was found, $\beta = -.04$, $p > .10$. This interaction effect was qualified by a three-way interaction effect between ethnic group, gender and victimization, $F(1, 1009) = 3.64$, $p < .05$. The relationship between gender and victimization was only found for the Turkish early adolescents, not for their Dutch peers. For the Turkish girls, ethnic victimization was related to in-group bias, $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$, and for the Turkish boys β was $-.07$, $p > .10$.

Discussion

The aim of theorists and practitioners is to try to understand and reduce ethnic prejudices and conflicts among children. Different studies have examined the development of children's group preferences using psychological intergroup theories as a framework (e.g. Bennett *et al.*, 1998; Bigler, *et al.*, 1997; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001; Yee & Brown, 1992). However, these studies have predominantly focused on ethnic preferences and trait assignments and do not tell us much about the way children perceive ethnic conflicts (but see Sagar & Schofield, 1980). The present study has examined children's evaluation and interpretation of negative peer behaviour on the basis of ethnic group membership. In addition, existing studies focus predominantly on majority group children and examine ethnic attitudes independently of actual situations. The present study has focused on ethnic in-group and out-group attitudes among both Dutch and Turkish children and in relation to the classroom situation.

According to SIT, in-group bias is not inevitable but is affected by several factors, such as the type of social judgment, group identification, normative consideration and group status. In agreement with this, the present findings show that the perception of negative peer behaviour depends on the measure used to assess the effects, on the ethnic group of the participants, and on factors such as ethnic identification, perceived exposure to multicultural education and experiences with ethnic victimization. The fact that the effects found were moderated by these factors suggest that it is appropriate to concentrate on the question when specific effects occur rather than merely focusing on the particular ethnic attitudes children develop.

The children's mean overall evaluation of the perpetrator was negative and they focused on the perpetrator rather than the victim in explaining the negative social behaviour. In addition, the results show small amounts of in-group bias for the overall evaluation and for the locus of explanation, but not for the level of language abstraction with which the perpetrator's behaviour is explained. These small amounts of in-group bias may be due to the fact that it was the perception of negative behaviour that was examined. In-group bias is quite consistently found in evaluation dimensions and behaviour with positive connotations but not in negatively valued dimensions or negative behaviour (see Bennett *et al.*, 1998; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Buhl, 1999; Mummendey & Otten, 1998). In general, the differential evaluation of negative traits or behaviour is less socially justifiable than the differential evaluation of positive traits or behaviour. Negative valence has been found to increase public concern with

the legitimacy and appropriateness of unequal group evaluations (Mummendey & Otten, 1998). Furthermore, Killen and Stangor (2001) found that older children use social normative reasoning and rejected social exclusion on the basis of group stereotypes.

In the present study, it was found that perceived exposure to multicultural education affected the perception of ethnic exclusion. More exposure to multicultural education appeared to be related to a more negative evaluation of the perpetrator and to less in-group bias. Hence, normative considerations were found to affect the differential perception of social exclusion. Interestingly, multicultural education affected the Dutch participants in particular. Only among the Dutch, was exposure to multicultural education related to a more negative evaluation of an in-group perpetrator, less in-group bias and to the extent to which the children's explanation of the behaviour focused on the perpetrator. In the Netherlands multicultural education tends to focus on the ethnic attitudes of Dutch children, and ethnic discrimination by Dutch children is more readily recognized by teachers and pupils than discrimination by minority group children.

These results show that the classroom context has an impact on the attitudes towards groups (see also Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). However, it might be argued that the findings regarding the influence of the school-class on ethnic attitudes actually reflect socially desirable responses. In certain classrooms, majority group children in particular may be more aware of the social undesirability of making ethnic distinctions. The implicit starting-point of this explanation is that children have particular attitudes, which they may or may not express truthfully. From a social learning perspective there may indeed be distorting demand characteristics, although there are several studies of children suggesting that this effect is limited (e.g. Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988). However, from the perspective of intergroup theories, one can argue that people always do use categories and tend to express attitudes flexibly as functions of the normative social context. Several studies have shown that the manipulation of in-group norms and beliefs influences in-group bias (see Ellemers *et al.*, 1999). Hence, group bias can be understood in terms of the meaning of social categories and normative conditions.

In addition, in the present study, no in-group bias was found for the linguistic abstraction with which the behaviour of the perpetrator was described. In general, people are unaware of subtle variations in the language abstraction of explanations (e.g. Von Hippel *et al.*, 1997) as language abstraction is a rather implicit or unobtrusive measure of intergroup attitudes (Maass *et al.*, 2000). The fact that for this measure no in-group bias was found suggests that there were no distorting socially desirable responses. This result also suggests that in early adolescence, there is no major change from explicit to more implicit expressions of negative ethnic attitudes. Research on prejudice in childhood has found that prejudice diminishes considerably from the ages of 8 to 9 years and onwards (see Aboud, 1988; Brown, 1995, for reviews). However, it has been suggested that this decline is due to the growing awareness of social norms that cause ethnic prejudice to be expressed in more subtle and indirect ways (Nesdale, 2001). The present results show no greater in-group bias for language abstraction compared to the explicit evaluation measure. In fact, in-group bias was found on the latter rather than the former measure. One reason may be that the linguistic abstraction at which types of in- and out-group behaviour are explained is not very relevant when assessing ethnic attitudes in (older) children. However, several differences were found for the linguistic abstraction measure that were related to the participants' personal experiences with ethnic victimization and to gender. In addition, gender bias has been

found for the linguistic level of abstraction at which social exclusion is explained by boys and girls (Verkuyten *et al.*, 2003).

Future studies have to examine the present findings for language abstraction more closely, also in the context of positive types of behaviour. These studies should use explicit and implicit measures to assess similar kinds of judgments, as group categorization effects may depend on the type of social judgment (e.g. Jackson *et al.*, 1993). In the present study, the explicit measure focused on the evaluation of the perpetrator whereas the linguistic abstraction measure focused on the explanation of the behaviour. Explicit and implicit measures of evaluations and attributions are needed.

In addition to differences between the Dutch and Turkish participants, the results show important similarities for both groups. First of all, as expected, for both groups ethnic identification was related to in-group evaluation but not to the evaluation of the out-group perpetrator. Thus, consistent with other data (e.g. Bennett *et al.*, 1998; Bigler *et al.*, 1997), identification tended to be accompanied by in-group bias because it involved a more positive evaluation of the in-group. This pattern of results shows the importance of a distinction between the in-group and out-group aspects of intergroup differentiation when studying ethnic majority and minority groups (Cameron *et al.*, 2001; Nesdale, 2001). Thus, in order to improve our understanding of ethnic attitudes, in-group bias should be studied as well as both aspects of intergroup differentiation.

However, the relationship between ethnic identification and in-group evaluation may to some degree be due to the evaluative statements used in measuring identification (e.g. 'I am glad to be Turkish'). Although such a measure is frequently used in social psychological research (e.g. Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999), it is close to the evaluation of one's group as a whole.

Secondly, for both ethnic groups, ethnic victimization turned out to be related positively to in-group and out-group evaluation. That is, more experience of peer victimization because of one's ethnic background was related to relatively less negative evaluation of the perpetrator. Furthermore, in the explanation of the exclusionary behaviour of an out-group member, ethnic victimization was related to a weaker focus on the perpetrator relative to the victim. For boys, moreover, more experience of ethnic discrimination was associated with a less abstract linguistic explanation of the behaviour of an out-group member.

Existing research has largely ignored the role of children's negative experiences in understanding ethnic attitudes. Research on the contact hypothesis has typically focused on the social conditions under which positive contact may reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954; Brown, 1995). The role of negative contact has not been examined empirically (but see Verkuyten, 2002). The present results show that children who face ethnic victimization perceive the out-group *less* negatively. There are several possible interpretations of this result. One is that ethnic victimization indicates low social status that is related to out-group bias (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Another interpretation is that victimization experiences lead to internalization problems such as low self-esteem and high self-blame (Deater-Deckard, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). These problems may result in a rather more favourable attitude towards the perpetrator and a relatively stronger focus on the role of the victim. Another interpretation is that experiences with ethnic victimization may lead to greater knowledge of the dynamics of victimization processes and of the circumstances in which they take place. A more elaborate and situational understanding of social exclusion may involve a weaker straightforward moral condemnation of the perpetrator in the story. Future studies should examine

these and other possible interpretations. The present results, however, clearly indicate the importance of addressing children's own experiences in examining ethnic attitudes.

The effects for ethnic identification and ethnic victimization were found for both Turkish and Dutch early adolescents. However, there were also differences between the two ethnic groups. In the Netherlands, there are clear status differences between Dutch and Turkish people that seem relevant in attempting to understand these differences. First, the results show that Turkish children face more ethnic victimization than their Dutch contemporaries. This is consistent with data from other Dutch studies (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Furthermore, the results show that, compared to Dutch children, Turkish children scored higher on ethnic identification. This result is in agreement with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) which predicts that, especially in situations where group boundaries are perceived to be impermeable and relatively stable, minority group members stress their ethnic identity in order to counteract a negative social identity. Hence, the fact that Turks have a low social status in the Netherlands, which is recognized by both Dutch and Turkish children (e.g. Verkuyten *et al.*, 1997), may be responsible for the higher score on ethnic identification by the Turkish participants.

In addition to the effects discussed, gender differences emerged. In both ethnic groups, boys scored higher on ethnic identification than girls, and only among boys was ethnic victimization related to the level of linguistic abstraction in the explanation of social exclusion by an out-group member. A possible explanation is that boys are more concerned with the differences in status and prestige found in groups (Cross & Madson, 1997). Boys show a higher participation in (competitive) activities that are based on group identities, whereas girls tend to belong to small groups that are based on interests and interpersonal attraction.

Furthermore, more than Dutch girls, Dutch and Turkish boys showed in-group bias in their explanation of negative peer behaviour. This is in agreement with the finding that, in general, girls are more sensitive to, for example, social exclusion than boys (e.g. Killen & Stangor, 2001; Wentzel & Erdley, 1993). A possible reason is that girls more often experience being excluded from, for example, gender-specific activities. However, this gender difference was moderated by ethnic group. Turkish girls showed more in-group bias in language abstractedness than Dutch ones. Furthermore only among Turkish girls was ethnic victimization related positively to this bias. This suggests that the social position of Turkish girls differs from that of Dutch girls in that they may be facing somewhat different challenges. In addition, experiences with ethnic victimization may mean something different to the Turkish boys than the Turkish girls. These ideas, however, remain to be tested in future work.

To evaluate the present results and to give some suggestions for further study, two limitations of the research will be considered. First, it is important to note that some of the significant differences found are not very strong. The large sample size can be considered a strength of the study, but it also makes rather small effects statistically significant. The fact that the multivariate analyses showed significant differences is important, but the small effect sizes limit the practical and theoretical implications of the findings. However, the relatively small effects may be due to the use of short stories about negative ethnic peer behaviour. More vivid and realistic stimuli could yield stronger results (Duncan, 1976). Using a sample of 80 children, Sagar and Schofield (1980), for example, studied the perceptions of ambiguously aggressive acts using oral descriptions and pictorial material. Both white and black early adolescents were found to rate these acts as more mean and threatening when the perpetrator was black than

when he was white. Hence, future studies could use more realistic stimuli for examining ethnic in-group bias in the context of negative peer behaviour.

Secondly, negative peer behaviour was examined in terms of social exclusion and the unequal division of goods. These stories were used and analysed as examples of normative transgressions. However, there are other forms of negative peer behaviour such as name-calling and physical bullying that could be examined. For example, compared to social exclusion, incidences of ethnic name-calling have been found to be more common, more noticed and socially less justifiable (e.g. Smith & Shu, 2000; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1997). Furthermore, in many situations the social behaviour is ambiguous. It is likely that ethnic in-group bias is stronger for the evaluation and explanation of ambiguous negative peer behaviour. In addition, the understanding of the factors involved in ethnic in-group bias for negative peer behaviour could be improved by making comparisons with positive peer behaviours.

In sum, this study has examined ethnic attitudes among majority and minority group early adolescents in the context of negative peer behaviour and by assessing different kinds of social judgments. The aim was to reach a better understanding about the ways early adolescents evaluate and interpret negative peer behaviour in terms of intergroup relations. Psychological research on ethnic attitudes predominantly focuses on peer preferences and trait assignments. These studies have produced many important findings, but have not given much insight into the way that children perceive ethnic conflicts in relation to their own experiences and to particular settings such as schools. The lack of such studies is unfortunate because protection from forms of ethnic victimization (such as social exclusion) is a key prerequisite for the quality of life that children have a right to expect. Future work involving a wider range of contexts, participants and methods is needed to provide further understanding about the ways in which children of different ages perceive negative behaviour by peers from their own as well as other ethnic groups.

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